

**Oak Park Historic Preservation Commission
Downtown Historic Preservation Public Meeting
January 23, 2007 Meeting Minutes
Oak Park Public Library, Veterans Room – 7:00 pm**

PRESENT: Chair Douglas Gilbert, Frank Lipo, Kate Susmilch, Bob Lempera, Marsha Moseley

ABSENT: Doug Freerksen, Karen Doty, Tom Bassett-Dilley, Todd Young, Nick Kalogeresis

STAFF: Doug Kaarre, Urban Planner

Chair Douglas Gilbert introduced the public meeting to discuss historic preservation planning for downtown Oak Park. He noted various handouts that are also available on the Village website. There are sign-in sheets for speakers. Not all Commission members could be present, being out of town or ill. He has been the chair since 2002, joining the Commission in 2001. He is a preservation architect in Chicago working in the business for over 10 years.

Commissioner Bob Lempera is a retired architect who worked for Perkins & Will and Amoco, Corp. He's new to the Commission and historic preservation. He owns a historic bungalow.

Commissioner Frank Lipo has been on the Commission since 2002 and has been the director of the Historical Society of Oak Park & River Forest for 13 years.

Commissioner Kate Susmilch has been on the Commission since 2003. She is a member of the Architectural Review Committee. She served as Board President for her historic condo building for five years.

Planner Doug Kaarre is an Urban Planner with the Village and the staff liaison for the Historic Preservation Commission. He has worked for the Village since 2001 and studied planning and historic preservation in college.

Chair Gilbert stated that this is the first of three public meetings where the Commission is seeking public comment and answer questions. The second meeting is on January 30 at the Library. The Commission will discuss what they've heard and a potential direction at their February 8 meeting. The third public meeting will be on February 21 at Village Hall, focusing on the issues identified at the February 8 meeting. The notices are posted on the Village's web site.

The Commission is charged with identifying, preserving, protecting and enhancing the distinctive historic and architectural heritage of Oak Park and enhancing the attractiveness of the Village to homeowners, tourists and shoppers and supporting the community in a business and residential sense. Downtown is a very important part of our community. In many ways it is the heart and soul of any community, including Oak Park, even though there are a number of different commercial districts. When we're talking about Downtown, its roughly bounded on the South by the railroad tracks, on the North by Ontario, on the east by

Forest Avenue, and on the West by Harlem Avenue. Historic preservation is an important part of this community and has been for over 30 years when Oak Park began a formal process for recognizing its historic character and working to enhance and protect it and use it as an important planning tool for the future of the community. Historic Preservation is a planning tool that can be used to create a framework for how a community will look or move towards its future. Other tools include zoning laws, TIF districts, planned development ordinances, special service areas and other activities which all contribute to a manner of creating a direction for a community. If a community values its historic character and wants to enhance itself as a community and create its own unique sense of place, then this is one way of doing that.

We're here tonight to discuss how preservation can be a part of the future of Downtown. There are many issues that go into making a successful and vital commercial district. Preservation should only be one part of that. The Commission is looking for a way to bring a recommendation back to the Board on how preservation can fit and balance with all of the values that the community has for the downtown. The downtown community of property and business owners are the greatest stakeholders downtown. Everyone wants a healthy downtown that's vital and active, and that starts with the businesses and property owners. Therefore it is very important to have that dialogue with the interests and stakeholders downtown to come to an understanding of how preservation can fit well with that.

There are several formal ways in which preservation can work in a downtown. The Commission has identified several of those for discussion, though there may be others. The Commission is open to other ideas as well. They include formal designations to recognize historic buildings and provide a framework for how we treat historic properties. Just as zoning can implement how we treat density or building height, preservation can frame how we treat the historic character of our buildings. There are three options explained in more detail in the handouts. The first is a National Register of Historic Places historic district. It's a national honorary listing that recognizes historic places either individually or as larger districts – an area that comprehensively is historic, not necessarily each individual building. There are no restrictions on private property owners by the Federal, State or Local government. Private property owners would be free to do what they wish even though they are listed on the National Register. It does come with financial incentives. Another handout explains these further.

A second option is a local historic district, locally designated by the Village of Oak Park. We currently have three local and three National Register districts in Oak Park which overlap. Frank Lloyd Wright-Prairie School of Architecture Historic District, the Ridgeland-Oak Park Historic District, and the Gunderson Historic District. Buildings within a district that are historic are referred to as "contributing" properties and fall under the review guidelines of the Oak Park Historic Preservation ordinance. The ordinance is primarily advisory in nature. They review alterations that are visible from the street and have an opportunity to advise and comment. There is a 30-day limit, at which time the owner is free to move forward with their project. There are cases when demolition of properties – in whole or significant part – requires that the Commission issue a Certificate of Appropriateness. This is a mandatory review with the idea that demolition has a permanent impact on a historic building or district and the Commission has the binding authority to review that project. That includes removing an entire structure or removing an entire roof

structure or removing the back end or side – that would be considered significant demolition.

He asked for a show of hands on how many lived in Oak Park and how many lived in a historic district. He also asked how many were downtown property owners and business owners.

The third option the Commission is investigating is individually landmarking properties that are significant. Landmarks are locally designated, going through a public process with the Commission making a recommendation to the Village Board. The Board has the final say on both landmarks and historic districts. A landmark is a building that stands on its own architecturally or historically. Examples include Frank Lloyd Wright's Home and Studio, Unity Temple, Pilgrim Church, the Plaza Hotel, Pleasant Home, Maze Library, Cheney Mansion, and others. The threshold for designating a landmark is higher than buildings that would only contribute to a larger whole in a district. Any exterior alterations to a landmark are subject to mandatory review by the Commission – they are not advisory.

Those three options offer a range of local government interaction with downtown property and business owners. The National Register has none; the local district prevents demolition of contributing structures (a majority), though most alterations are advisory and provides a lot of flexibility for other buildings.

He called attention to the Downtown Architectural Survey completed by the Commission in 2005. It identifies buildings that have architectural merit – some historic character; significant buildings which could be designated as landmarks; and buildings of no merit, which have no historic character. There are also financial incentives available that apply in the three options. In theory TIF funds could be used for historic renovations. There are other opportunities for preservation to a part of the downtown process. The Commission could advise on planned developments, zoning changes or other actions that require Village approval. The Commission already has that authority in historic districts and within 250 feet of Landmarks. It is a potential option where a downtown zone could be created for the Commission to advise on future applications.

He presented some photos of commercial buildings located within existing Oak Park historic districts that have undergone alterations. It is meant as an example of the flexibility that commercial buildings and storefronts have within historic districts. The projects include storefront replacements and restorations, building renovations and alterations, including two Historic Preservation Award winners.

He opened the meeting for public comments and questions.

Brian Bernardoni, with the Oak Park Board of Realtors and the Illinois Association of Realtors, stated that he represents the Oak Park Board of Realtors on behalf of their director Jeff Merrimette. Jeff is a highly capable and knowledgeable colleague – however he and his wife are expecting – and he is subsequently detained. The Oak Park Board of Realtors offices are located at 212 South Marion Street in Oak Park. Members of the Association are here tonight and we are happy to address this issue on their behalf. Prior to my five years with the Chicago Association of Realtors, I coordinated Economic Development in the Little Italy section of Chicago and have gone through the master planning process with the Illinois Medical District and the University Village area; as well as efforts with Chicago Metropolis 2020 – so this is an area that I enjoy to work with. The Oak Park Board of Realtors has asked the Illinois Association of Realtors to review the issue of designating downtown Oak

Park as some sort of historic district and comment on the implications of such a designation. It is our understanding there is no “plan” or proposal, only a directive from the Village Board to recommend some sort of plan to create a historic district. We understand that a choice of no designation is also an option.

We have attempted, in the wake of this directive to assess some of the major implications for such a designation. We reserve additional comment as the process continues. The impetus for this effort stems from the Oak Park Downtown Master Plan approved in 2005. This plan, authored by Crandall Arambula PC, itemizes twelve guiding principles for the downtown district:

1. Reduce Traffic Congestion
2. Preserve Historic/Small Town Feel
3. Revitalize Retail
4. Address Building Height and Density
5. Improve Parking Supply
6. Provide High Quality Design
7. Identify Project Financial Implications
8. Improve Planning Process
9. Enhance the Pedestrian Environment
10. Provide Additional Open Space
11. Revitalize Marion Mall
12. Improve Transit Usage

The Master Plan indicates the Village of Oak Park is serious in plotting out a future encouraging quality and diversity while preserving the best of its past. It is important to note, however that the second issue – to “preserve historic/small town feel” does not mandate a historic preservation district or plan. Our reading of the master plan indicates the guidelines are not specifically ranked in order, simply that all items are goals to be addressed.

As an opener, we suggest building design through Oak Park’s existing codes may have a dramatic impact on the quality of the buildings in the downtown without the additional burden of a historic district. In other words, the Commission, working in concert with the Village may be able to get the same desired effect they would achieve through the code itself.

Revitalizing retail uses is listed as a goal, which needs to be balanced with the downtown’s desire for preservation. Clearly the goal of preservation will need to contribute to fill storefronts, rather than to see them go underutilized or even worse empty. Historic preservation is not a stand-alone recruitment tool for today’s retail clients.

Realtors associations across the nation have worked tirelessly to preserve private property rights and due process relative to land use issues. With that we urge the Village to be mindful that while the community’s desire for a vital downtown is laudable, each of the downtown buildings is privately owned and the owners of these buildings have millions of dollars invested in their continued use and growth. These owners have worked to maintain the sustainable and walkable economic development Oak Park enjoys, and other communities envy. Clearly a balanced, reasonable approach is needed with a process preserving the property rights of the owners and recognizing the goals of municipal officials. In order to form our thoughts, we at the Illinois Association of Realtors have reached out to several other communities in Illinois and across the United States that have downtown historic districts.

For example, in Virginia, the Commonwealth holds the power to create historic districts and only creates such a district after lengthy research, complete analysis, and extended public outreach. Here in Illinois, local building owners in the Lincoln sites area told us reasonableness needs to be considered before creating such a district. While many owners understood the sentiments of preservationists, and moreover appreciate their passion for these buildings – the municipal officials need to be aware of the unsound nature of many old buildings. One owner indicated that the long, complicated process for a Certificate of Appropriateness cost him dollars he wanted to use to improve his crumbling building.

I would assure you, being witness to the time we have seen for some properties to obtain permits in Chicago, that time is money – and a cost that must be recognized in any process. Building owners in Savannah, Georgia and several towns in Maryland told us the similar stories. Your effort to develop a balanced and reasonable process and a predictable result and approach is needed. If the Commission or the Village demands; we would be happy to recount these stories for you with documentation if need be from across the country.

Guiding principle seven of the Master Plan calls on Oak Park to identify the financial implications of proposed projects. While this public hearing is an excellent step towards better definition of Oak Park's downtown, buildings need to be easily adaptable to these new demands, or they will fall vacant. To that point another aspect to consider is that certain restrictions you place on a commercial parcel may ultimately limit the types of businesses you may ultimately want to attract due to excessive regulations or limitations. Not every one owner or business can do as well, or has the financial means as a national chain store such as Borders has had in adapting to an existing structure. Smaller, locally based businesses or chains may suffer. We must be mindful that economic development and commercial re-development is highly competitive in even the least of regulated communities.

Oak Park's history of growth and adaptation to new circumstances has been demonstrated many times. From a surge of growth after the 1871 Great Chicago Fire, the 1920s, rekindled growth after World War II, and finally the boom of the 1990s, Oak Park has grown and adapted to each new generation, each new development added to the community. This growth has produced a variety of building styles, a variety of uses, and a variety of commercial zones which produce what is now referred to as "small town feel."

The Realtors of Oak Park encourage the Village to take stock in its heritage as a town that welcomes the new, preserves the best of the old, and gives property owners clear and reasonable zoning and building codes.

It is our opinion the Village of Oak Park should explore not only the historic preservation issue being discussed tonight, but also discuss:

- 1) The larger issue of creating a zoning code and building code building owners can work with;
- 2) Creation of an Oak Park building code adaptable to the needs of an older building owner;
- 3) Creation of a process an owner can understand, participate in, and know that an answer will be quick and fairly arrived at.

In some communities this is known as "form based code" or new urbanism. Oak Park's downtown, transected by busy transit line and bordered by two historic residential

districts really cries out for a new approach to zoning which encourages adaptive reuse and allows buildings which cannot be adapted to be removed or purchased by the Village.

We as Realtors support ordinances clearly stating incentives for preservation, not punitive actions legally conforming uses. We support the demolition of buildings that are functionally obsolete, structurally unsound or economically unable to adapt to current uses. We also support a process whereby property owner's rights are clear, timely and predictable. This is a necessity in any decision this board makes.

Finally, we urge a holistic process, blending the Realtors, downtown property owners, and the Community, as well as those who fully understand economic development, planning, construction and TIF. This will be critical as you move forward to implement your master plan and the goal for nearly 500,000 additional square feet of retail and commercial growth. The Oak Park Board of Realtors looks forward to continuing this dialogue with both property owners and Village officials to develop the very best plan for the downtown.

Willis Johnson, owner of the Lake Theater, stated that a commercial area needs to be flexible and adapt to the times and circumstances. When he was reflecting on the Marshall Field's building several years ago the owners were approached about putting a college on the upper floors and it needed a sign on the outside of the building. He believes the building is individually designated at the owners desire, and it was stated that because the exterior had been designated historic no sign would ever go up on the building. It now continues to sit vacant. He also thinks about the Lake Theater, which is a significant building. It was Henry Austin's home originally. If the home still sat there it would be unlikely that the Lake Theater could be there. Downtown Oak Park feels that there is a fourth option, which is to take no action – keep the status quo. It is very viable. I believe in preservation and have preserved a number of buildings, but it should be the choice of the property owner. It is private property. The property owner needs to have the flexibility to do with commercial property what needs to be done to be able to adapt to the times and prospective tenants to continue to survive economically. As he regularly says, 85 cents of every dollar of the Lake Theater goes to property taxes. We have to maintain economic viability. Mandated historic preservation limits your ability to maintain economic viability.

Chair Gilbert noted that the Marshall Field's building is not locally designated. It is listed on the National Register and has an exterior façade easement that is held by a private organization.

Gary Mancuso, President of the Oak Park Board of Realtors, stated that he is speaking on behalf of the Board of Directors and many members of the Oak Park Board of Realtors. It goes without saying that we absolutely support and cherish historic preservation. As Realtors in Oak Park we promote every day the values of being a part of this great community including at the top of the list historic preservation. However, in regards to overlaying a historic district over the business district we wish to voice our concerns and ask you to move very cautiously with your recommendation to the Village Trustees. Your recommendation could have and most likely would have serious economic consequences for the entire Village, not just the business district. The residential community has a large tax burden as it exists today. We need a vital downtown business district that generates tax revenues to help supplement village revenues and possibly give relief to the residential property owners.

When people decide to move to a community there are many variables they consider. A vital downtown business district is one of these variables. Without this variable many people may decide not to move here. If this becomes a significant issue, there is a real possibility the residential market of Oak Park could be impacted in regards to property values. We believe imposing any kind of historic designation would impede potential investors who can vitalize our downtown and allow it to evolve for future generations to come.

The success of a vibrant downtown is dependent on attracting new business which means at times buildings of downtown Oak Park must be able to adapt or they become nothing more than vacant eyesores. Again, we ask you that as you move forward with this process you move forward with caution and understanding the possible consequences to the entire Village, not just the business district.

Anthony Shaker, owner of 1100 Lake Street and 1101 Lake Street and others, has been a resident of Oak Park and River Forest for 58 years. He pays \$600,000 in property taxes for the streets, parks, schools and the government. He's a good corporate citizen and the largest private employer in Oak Park. People get in their cars at lunch or at 5:00 and go to Forest Park, Elmwood Park and River Forest to shop and eat. This is an ill-conceived action and ill-timed. Downtown Oak Park is hardly now the heart and soul of Oak Park. Who are we kidding? Who shops there for quality goods and food on a consistent basis? He has 45,000 square feet in his building. He has to make a proper environment for them to work and succeed. They can't park, move around Lake Street or shop. They don't want to stay at night. There are vacancies galore on Marion Street. No one wants to occupy a store where people can't reach except on Sunday with a stroller. If the government believes that a building is of great historical merit, sit down and talk to that owner and try to convince him of the meager financial benefits involved to become enmeshed in the governmental process. I don't think any of you would want to voluntarily throw yourselves at the mercy of governmental boards. It's ridiculous.

I say this respectfully, but I believe this is a politically motivated action that will fall in place right before the April elections. I have the study session minutes of the Board from last May and they expected you to report back to them last fall. They said don't interfere with the September shopping time. We had our first meeting on December 7 at 8:00 a.m. at the Lake Theater. Is that convenient? And the report, we're told – we're going to rush these meetings every two weeks and have a report to the Board and recommendation at the end of March. The elections are in April. There are 58 property owners downtown. We had two meetings with the Commission. Not one owner said they were in favor of it or would seek the historic 20% tax credits. It's not a matter that the buildings are in violation of buildings codes – no one wants that. We're talking about buildings that are compliant with building codes. We're now going to have governmental intervention of private property owners and it's just not fair. It's not fair in Oak Park. We're so egalitarian and we think we are better than other people, and we are. We're educated, we help the needy, we should have a great self-image. But to say that we're going to have a special interest group interfere with our property rights when there's no justification for it is very unfair.

I think what's going to happen is to blanket downtown Oak Park and make it a historic district. We'll hire attorneys and accountants and try and talk our way out of it. We asked the Commission at the last meeting if they had gone to property owners and asked them if they were in favor. They think they sent a letter but no one responded. Have they

attempted to get residential property owner who objected to historic designation involved and they said yes there were two of them, but it's easier to do something in mass because it's too costly and time-consuming. Well, you're interfering with our property. I don't care how much it costs you. How much does it cost us? We're trying to run a business, run a property. For a service or retail business, this is not what we need now. We need help in downtown Oak Park like businesses and restaurants for people who live in Oak Park. Not to have one more issue in addition to all the others facing downtown Oak Park. It's the wrong issue at the wrong time. This has been on the drawing board for seven years, and now you're attacking it? A couple buildings went up and we got someone's knee-jerk reaction. You don't like the Whiteco building or the building going up behind the bank. So now we're dealing with this issue now with all the other issues we're facing. If you want a vibrant Oak Park "the heart and soul of Oak Park" look beyond this issue. There are a lot more important issues.

Kathryn Jonas stated that she is really disappointed at the turnout. Thank you for holding the meeting. There was nothing in the Wednesday Journal about it. In 2005 there were over 100 people at Pleasant Home for a similar conversation. I hope for the next meeting there is more effort made to get the word out. She wants to respond to Mr. Shaker and Mr. Johnson. We're all talking about vacancies in Oak Park, shopping in Forest Park, etc. We don't have a downtown historic district or a Main Street right now. We have a downtown business association that has run downtown for many years. We've had a TIF downtown for 23 years – \$80 million. Where have you guys been, what have you been doing? We have more vacancies on Lake Street (Certified, 1000, Village-owned and privately owned) than on Marion, which is a mall. You need some input in downtown Oak Park. You comment about all these other Villages – Hinsdale, Naperville, LaGrange. Madison Street in Forest Park has controls. They've done a wonderful job. They have a Main Street program which has brought in an incredible amount of business. I'm tired of hearing from the same people in downtown Oak Park that you don't want anything to change. Things are the way they are because sharks have been circling downtown Oak Park for years, buying up little properties waiting for the killing. That's the truth about what's going on in downtown Oak Park, and you don't want anyone to step in. Harrison Street and Avenue/Lake doesn't have the kind of vacancies you have. What is the Downtown Oak Park business association doing? You don't want the Main Street program, you don't want an historic district. You want all the control yourselves but you want us to shop there and support it? You're right, there's very little to do in downtown Oak Park. It should be like LaGrange, Hinsdale or Lake Forest. We have the demographics and the ability to make it beautiful. But the few private interests out there that are waiting to make a killing on these properties is what is stifling any kind of revitalization in downtown Oak Park and that is the truth.

I have a comment about historic district designation. I don't think it is necessarily the solution. A lot of other towns mentioned that people love are vital and historic and don't have historic districts. They have height limitations. They don't have the ability to build 120 feet. The economic pressure keeps these buildings in disrepair – that's what is happening. Mr. Shaker, your building is the only one that has undergone restoration in how many years in downtown Oak Park. People are not maintaining their buildings because they're waiting for the killing. They're waiting for their parcels to be assembled. The Pancake House is going to be 120 feet – 12 stories. The way the current zoning is, we'll be left with a few little historic buildings, like the Drechsler Building, smashed in between things like the RSC

fitness center and Whiteco. Is that what we want? Let's talk about a vision for downtown Oak Park, not whether to do national or local register or landmarking. We've never gathered everyone together to talk about what kind of a vision we want for downtown Oak Park. We have scattered meetings here and there with a handful of people showing up, usually the same people, and we are not going to arrive at a vision we can all get behind and support.

She would appreciate if the Commissioners present tonight would comment on the scale and height of the RSC building and its impact on the historic Drechsler Building. Height impacts historic character.

Chair Gilbert stated that zoning regulations and height can have an effect on historic character. There are many planning tools that go into making an effective effort to revitalize the downtown and frame and guide its future. Zoning is an important one. There was some previous effort to do some down-zoning downtown. It is an issue that should be talked about.

Commissioner Lipo stated that vision-wise, there are unique things people know Oak Park for. There should be some better interface with tourism issues broadly in the community. Not that there hasn't been any work, but what kind of downtown do we want for current residents. Regarding RSC there is somewhat of a disjointed nature, as in any community, when you have various commissions that deal with different issues. It would be a benefit if we were all on one page. A clear, more rapid process may also be helpful.

Mr. Bernardoni responded that Taylor Street is a destination location with only Italian restaurants. If you wanted something else you would struggle somewhat. That's something the local chamber had to deal with. The idea that you can shop in one neighborhood and sustain yourself is good, but you need the floorplates to do it. The way Oak Park's grid is set up is kind of prohibitive to do it.

Gene Armstrong stated that Peaslee's operated a successful hardware store on Madison Street in Forest Park for several years. He may have some ideas on what it takes to have a successful business district.

Lynn Kamenitsa asked how far the borders of the Ridgeland Historic District go into what is traditionally considered downtown.

Commissioner Lipo stated he believes it is along Lake Street to the Scoville Building or one building west on Lake to Medical Arts Building west, south on Oak Park Avenue to almost Madison Street.

Lynn Kamenitsa asked if South Marion and South Blvd. are in the Ridgeland District.

Chair Gilbert stated that the Niles Building and Carleton Hotel are in the district, but the block to the east is not in the district.

Gregory Melnyk stated that he is a property owner in the Ridgeland Historic District on the other side of the tracks. The Ridgeland Historic District goes all the way to Maple Avenue on the east. Just because something is old doesn't mean its worth saving. 90-95% of the

property owners in downtown Oak Park have a large investment in the Village and for the most part keep up their buildings. They don't let them run down. They spend a lot of money just to maintain their buildings. They want to see a vibrant Village. It's in their benefit. If someone thinks that a particular building is significant and worth saving, they should put their money where their mouth is and get together and buy it if the owner doesn't want to do anything. The Village shouldn't buy it with taxpayer's money. For example, the Frank Lloyd Wright Home and Studio was purchased and restored by individuals. If someone is not willing to put their money into buying a building they say is significant, then it can't really be that important to them. It's the individual property owners that have sunk their money into it. They've spent their time, effort and sweat in maintaining a property and keeping it going. They should have the say over it. If somebody else feels something is important, they should negotiate to pay a fair price to do it. It should be on an individual basis not on a governmental basis.

Gene Armstrong stated that if the Commission is going to recommend which of the three options stated, it would be totally unfair not to include doing nothing as an option. He became interested because it appeared as if it was a done deal. Which way are we going to impose this obligation on the property owners of downtown Oak Park. Do nothing is a damn good option. He also keeps thinking about his experience in Oak Park. The notion that we're going to do something to preserve historic Downtown Oak Park. He has an affinity for small shops. He used to shop at Spauldings for decades and he's sorry they're gone. Life moves on. He goes to Fitzgeralds and the Paper Source. He's not traipsing off to Office Depot all the time. You hear people saying they don't want these cookie-cutter chains or national retailers, but 50 years ago Oak Park had Montgomery Wards, Sears, Wieboldts, Fields, Baskins, Lyttons. Peck & Peck from New York used to be where the bread store was. We were not a bucolic semi-rural collection of shops, it was a destination shopping district because it had those stores. If you want to have preservation of downtown Oak Park, go get Sears or Marshall Fields back. Let's figure out what we're talking about here. We're not talking about historic preservation to once again make Oak Park a retail shopping district. We're focused on the desire of some to preserve buildings. That's what he thinks this is about. Some buildings may be worth preserving, some may not. He doesn't want to get involved in that debate.

There is a range of commitment to historic preservation from the Frank Lloyd Wright Home & Studio to the far end of the spectrum where they were advocating for the preservation of the West Town bus barns. They're advocating for the preservation of the circulating sign at Ridgeland and Lake Street, a classic 50's sign – don't spoil it. Advocating for the preservation of the multi-family home at the southeast corner Erie and Grove. It must be preserved because it is an example of how Oak Park transitioned from being a predominately single family community to one with both single and multifamily homes. Drive by the building, my friends. Let's have sensible preservation. Everybody is in favor of preservation. No property owners are in favor of having others tell hem how they have to deal with their property.

The notion that your proposal is somehow benign is belied by the desperate effort one must go through to get through the historic preservation process for a Certificate of Appropriateness or some other relief one might need in order to change your sidewalk, replace your window or do something to your property even as much as tear it down. This is not benign. This is putting a layer of regulation on property owners that will be severe.

Anybody who wants to have a major project in a place where they have to get permission from the Historic Preservation Commission has got to pencil in on their budget upwards of \$250,000 to get through the process. You want to know why we don't have a problem in Oak Park, we should look at how much it costs to make it happen. Don't do this without taking into consideration the likelihood that you are going to be perceived to have made the effort to develop Oak Park more complicated and expensive. And you're going to subject potential developers and property owners to – no offense, Ms. Jonas, but I'm no damn shark. I've owned a building with Greg in Oak Park for a long time. I didn't buy it to stockpile to make a fortune. I bought it for my business. We renovated and rehabbed it for our business. We're not sharks, we're property owners and put a lot of time and money into it. The lying doesn't help.

Charles Ziehn stated that he is an architect in Oak Park and lived here for four years. What Mr. Armstrong said about people not wanting others telling you how to handle your property – he's a little surprised at so much opposition to the greater good that Oak Park would realize from a more attractive downtown. That's what this boils down to. He only deals with residential architecture, but he's traveled around enough to see how many successful historically designated downtown business districts have been. Pasadena, South Beach, Galena, Charleston, Savannah. Every little shop filled and successful regardless of the configuration. I don't see any of these options being the death-knell to doing business in downtown Oak Park. We all do things for the greater good. I'm sure they are some annoyances and there might be some things you can't do. But people with no cars pay taxes for streets. People with no children pay taxes for schools. There are some things we do for the greater good. We could all probably agree which of the buildings are worth saving – they're the better looking older buildings. He's more concerned about the other buildings that have been altered over the years. The slides we saw earlier showed some very nice examples of changes to smaller buildings – going back to the way they looked originally or improvements. He doesn't know if the Commission was involved in those or not. There are also examples of communities to which people travel to shop and eat because they're attractive store by store. Sensitive remodeling has been done. He must assume they have pretty tight reviews – LaGrange, Naperville, Hinsdale. I don't know how they do things, but the newer buildings fit in. Whether or not any of these options are adopted, he would like to see Oak Park move in that direction. Have some design guidelines for remodeling the front – not to make it more expensive, but make it a more unified, attractive streetscape. I think it's worth doing.

Susan Roberts stated that she lives on Forest Avenue and she wants to prevent the proposed plaza and opening up Austin Gardens. She doesn't think historic district designation is the answer to the revitalization of downtown Oak Park. Whether it's building owners waiting for the big kill or whatever. Madison Street in Forest Park has just blossomed. She likes to walk there. We need a plan. It doesn't seem like "no plan" has worked. Something hasn't worked. I don't think you're the answer. I live at 202 Forest and have not designated my house historic. I do not want to have to go for all these stupid Certificates and having people tell me what to do with my home.

Chair Gilbert stated that in fairness the Commission is not saying that preservation is a panacea for what may ill downtown Oak Park. It is a possibility to be a partner with all the

other things that need to happen downtown to revitalize it. He also wants to emphasize that they should recognize all the good things from a preservation standpoint that have happened downtown. A number of property owners have been fantastic stewards of their buildings. Not just maintenance, but renovating and restoring and keeping them as vital as they can. Some do struggle, but most of the key buildings we can agree as important historic buildings are all success stories to date of good stewardship by their property owners. What this process is about is talking about what is the future or vision of downtown. The Commission is asking what is preservation's role in that future vision of downtown.

Frank Heitzman stated that he was the chair of the Commission for seven years when the current preservation ordinance was put in place and when the guidelines were written for architectural review. Buildings in the three historic districts go through an advisory review process where there is a "jawboning" session between the Commission, who are students and scholars of historic buildings, and the property owners. The owners don't have to do what's recommended, but perhaps there are some things they hadn't considered where they can see the advantage to them. Now we've been through 15 years of doing this in Oak Park. There were dozens of these kinds of meetings when the ordinance was considered. There was a lot of opposition based on property rights. There are a few buildings that are Landmarks, where you can't tear them down or make changes facing the street. In those cases where there is a civic reason to tear a building down, like at West Suburban Hospital, the Board of Trustees has the power to override the Commission's decision. This is not a control mechanism, it's a planning mechanism. Just as the zoning ordinance and building codes are. It's another way of ensuring that our community has the highest standards.

If this doesn't happen, you should realize that there will be some kind of controls downtown. The Board yesterday extensively discussed design controls in commercial districts and large apartment buildings larger than four units. When someone wants to remodel those instead of going to the Commission they'll have to go through some kind of process. One way or the other there will be controls in Oak Park, as there is in most communities where he works. It's unusual to remodel a building anywhere in the Chicago area that doesn't have some review process. He's an architect. If he doesn't see it he thinks maybe its not a town that cares about its environment like Oak Park does. It is benign until you want to tear a building down. If you tear a significant building down it's a loss to the entire community.

Gene Armstrong asked how many buildings are contributing in Oak Park.

Frank Heitzman responded about 3,000.

Chair Gilbert stated that about one-third of the Village is in a historic district.

Gene Armstrong stated that if you own a contributing building you are in the process.

Frank Heitzman responded only if you want to tear the building down or make significant changes to the street façade.

Gene Armstrong stated that there needs to be a clearer perception of what is so important to our community it requires that we save it at some cost. If a third of our properties in the

Village fall into that category, it seems to beg the question. He is a preservationist. He spent a lot of time raising money to save the Home & Studio. Tell me how preservation makes Oak Park better. Explain to me the positive consequences that will come from designating downtown Oak Park a historic district with whatever kind of additional regulation that represents. We've already got zoning laws. If you want to do something downtown that doesn't fall within the zoning, it behooves us to have something for good reason. We have a planned development ordinance, we have applications for variations. We've got tools that we can use in a technical way. There may a very good explanation for how a historic preservation overlay will be important and positive.

Frank Heitzman stated that hopefully he didn't get his opinions about the ordinance from the newspaper, because it made the case that anything 50 years old is automatically to be saved and that is absolutely not the case.

Gregory Melnyk stated that he disagrees. He's been before the Plan Commission and if it's a single-family home, it's on the lot line, the building line and it's over 50 years old it's a contributing factor. Doesn't matter what it looks like or who built it. That's the way it is.

Gene Armstrong stated that his good friend David Sokol stated on the record that the responsibility of the Commission was to make certain that nothing in Oak Park over 50 years old gets torn down.

Frank Heitzman stated that he over-exaggerated.

Chair Gilbert stated that they needed to move on as they would run out of time soon.

Vince Michael stated that he graduated from Oak Park High School and lived here the last 11 years the most recent time. He's involved in preservation and Gene knows he's behind the 226 Grove issue. Preservation is being mischaracterized in some ways. By talking about the Frank Lloyd Wright Home & Studio and Unity Temple, you're talking about restoration projects at the museum level which is entirely different than what happens to the majority of the 3,000 properties that are preserved day in and day out in Oak Park. Like my house in the district which is preserved because I live in it and don't let it fall apart. Preservation is adaptive reuse. Making the Home & Studio a museum is an adaptive reuse. Adaptive reuse is what made Madison Street in Forest Park and the Avenue Business District, which is in a historic district, vital and successful.

There's also been a lot of talk about zoning. Preservation is not foreign to zoning. It is a more precise form of zoning. If the Board decides to do architectural review, zoning is the cleaver and preservation the scalpel. One gives you a rough idea of what things are going to look like and one a more precise idea of what things are going to look like. Architectural Review Commissions are a scalpel as well.

For information purposes on the 20% tax credit, if there were interest on the Commission or Board on local designation, owners of property owners would be eligible for taking their taxes on a major rehab down to a 16% assessment.

Barbara Mullarkey stated that she's lived in Oak Park all her life. She went over the rankings in the architectural survey. 43 significant, 22 structures of merit, 19 contributing,

4 non-contributing and 30 no merit. She has the 2003 and 2005 surveys. What changes to the rankings of buildings were made between 2003 and the final version in 2005? How were these changes decided on.

We have two trustees in the audience, Gockel and Johnson, and maybe they could help me. She has been trying to find out for years the accountability of the downtown TIF and has yet to receive it. She asked recently again for the expenditures in the revenue from 1983 to present. She got a call before Christmas saying Greg Peters had done it. She never got it. His policy was to give it to the legal department. She has yet to receive it. This Village deserves an accountability on how \$80 million was spent on downtown Oak Park. Everyone seems to be complaining about it. If we've spent \$80 million since 1983, where did it go?

Unknown person stated it's only \$3 million per year.

Barbara Mullarkey stated that she lives in a historic district and has gotten code enforcement notices for peeling paint. She would like to know if commercial districts have code enforcement and get the same things she does. She has heard people complain about downtown buildings, including Village-owned buildings, that aren't being kept up. If that's true, why do residents get it and not businesses? I don't know if it's true or not.

Planner Kaarre, responded that he can look into that question and get back to her.

Barbara Mullarkey stated that she's lived through all the changes. Also, more and more people are asking her why they have to remove the mall. It's the one quiet, peaceful place in this Village that people can walk or sit on a bench. She hopes the Board turns that around. It's the core of Oak Park. If none of the TIF money was given to Westgate or Marion, then where did that money go?

Chair Gilbert stated that throughout the survey process there were a few changes that were made. One or two buildings were demolished. There were a handful that they found out more information on, which may have impacted their ranking. No buildings listed as significant were downgraded to structures of merit.

Pat Zubak, Executive Director of Downtown Oak Park, stated that she also counted buildings in the downtown proper and there's 23 significant, 13 structures of merit and 18 no merit. Everyone she talked to was surprised that there was more than 3 or 4 significant buildings downtown. Everyone has their favorite. 23 was a big surprise to most people. Out of the 23 significant buildings, there isn't one single building that is in danger of having anything meaningful done to it, as far as she knows. They've been researching other Certified Local Governments in Illinois, which have local designations, and there are very few towns in the state that have downtown historic districts – including Springfield. There is nothing local around here. All the towns we point to with fabulous, vital downtowns – Hinsdale, Forest Park – are not historic districts. Yes, we have issues. I try not to take it personally when you attack the downtown, but we do have a lot of issues and we're dealing with them. We're trying to talk to the Village about uses and the sign ordinance. These are tools that the downtown businesses and owners need help revitalizing. She's been involved in the Main Street program and downtown revitalization for many years. She will confidently tell you that preservation is not the answer to our issues.

Chair Gilbert asked if their survey of CLG's was only about local districts, because some of the communities mentioned do have downtown National Register districts.

Pat Zubak responded that they only looked at local historic districts.

Bill McNamara stated that he served on the Board of the Lake/Marion/Harlem Association and on the Downtown Oak Park Board. If he was a trustee now and received a report or recommendation, one of the glaring errors would be how could a building be classified as significant if you don't know the architect? That would raise a red flag. There are other things that have to be looked at. If I as a landowner don't have full control of my building, in terms of redevelopment, then how are we going to get the highest quality developers to give us a panacea of what we want downtown – how are they going to come in if they aren't able to purchase buildings that are part of their master plan. I don't want 3 or 4 people coming in that only do piece-meal development. I would prefer to have a high-quality developer with comprehensive plans. He thought the master plan was great. Downtown Oak Park, the organization, is charged with the daily operation of downtown. They make recommendations to the Village but don't set policy. If there is any lack of vision it's not from them. They're working hard and they're doing their job.

When you buy a piece of property – and he bought his decades ago – they were taking a big risk in those days. Times were tough. They had to pay their mortgage and worry about keeping the buildings occupied. He went through 10-12 really tough years when his business had to pay for the building. None of them are sharks.

Respectfully he would ask that their report or recommendation not be made to the Trustees until the new board is elected. Go back and say you think it would be more appropriate to make it to the new Board.

Chair Gilbert responded that many times buildings didn't have architects, but knowing the architect can be a reason why a building is significant. But it's not always the case. The significance may be the history, such as Ernest Hemingway's Boyhood Home.

He thanked everyone for coming. It was a good opportunity for the Commission to hear your opinions. The minutes will be passed on to other Commissioners. We hope to get more people here next week as well. Thank you for your opinions, you are being heard.

Meeting adjourned at 9:00 pm. Minutes prepared by Doug Kaarre, Urban Planner.

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